Ishmael ID:: Kurokumo Clan Captain

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Ishmael ID:: Kurokumo Clan Captain

by AllAborde (Bordementions)

Notes

Hihihihihi

KK ish I swear Mircalla Don iss up next and I have some... renewed motivation to continue Captain Ishmael haha... guh...

Hope you guys like it

https://discord.gg/GPBNYYxExz

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

The ropes bite into your wrists, coarse fibers digging into skin rubbed raw from struggling. Your shoulders ache from being strung up, suspended from the rafters like some pig ready for slaughter. Blood drips from your lip, staining the wooden floor beneath you. The air reeks of old wood, iron, and the lingering scent of ink.

Bootsteps echo against the floor. Measured. Unhurried. A shadow moves in the dim candlelight, and then she is before you—The thirty fourth Captain of the Kurokumo Clan.

Her kimono drapes loosely over her form, dark fabric flowing with each step. The wide sleeves shift as she folds her arms, revealing glimpses of inked waves curling over her fair skin. Her golden eyes glint like a blade catching the light, sharp like molten glass. A katana rests at her hip, but she hasn't drawn it yet.

She tilts her head, studying you like one might regard an insect crushed underfoot. Then, she exhales. "You Blade Lineage types really don't know when to quit, do you?" Her voice is calm, almost bored, but there's an edge beneath it—like a knife's whisper before it finds flesh.

You don't answer. Not immediately. Your tongue tastes like copper, and the throbbing pain in your ribs warns you against breathing too deep. But you're Blade Lineage. Pain isn't new. Neither is capture.

You smirk, lips splitting further. "Surprised we put up a fight?"

Ishmael raises a brow. "Surprised? Hardly. It's what I expect from a pack of stray dogs scrapping for survival." She steps closer, and you catch the faintest scent of flora, probably perfume. "But if you really thought you had a chance then you're more of a fool than I thought."

Her fingers trace the hilt of her blade, but she doesn't draw it. Not yet. Instead, she reaches out, grasping your jaw between cold fingers. You tense as she tilts your head, inspecting the fresh gash running down your cheek.

"Not bad," she muses, thumb pressing just hard enough to sting. "Not deep enough to be impressive, though. Did you hesitate?"

Your jaw clenches. "Didn't have to."

A short chuckle leaves her lips—dry, humorless. “Right. Because you lot wear your scars like badges.” Her grip tightens before she lets go, letting your head drop forward. “How pitiful.”

She steps back, shaking her head as if you’ve somehow disappointed her. Then, with a flick of her wrist, she gestures toward something behind you.

Footsteps approach. A rush of cold steel against your side. Pain erupts as a blade carves into your flesh—not deep enough to kill, but enough to make your nerves scream. You grit your teeth, swallowing the pained grunt threatening to escape.

Ishmael crouches before you, watching. Testing. “Let’s see how much pride those scars really hold.”

She leans in, voice a whisper against your ear. “If you want to prove you’re not a coward… then don’t scream.”

Ishmael watches you, expression unreadable as the fresh wound on your side seeps warmth down your ribs. You force your breath steady, clenching your jaw against the sting. Pain is nothing new. Pain is the song your body knows best, each scar a verse written in blood.

She exhales through her nose, almost annoyed. “Tch. I figured as much.” Her fingers ghost over the hilt of her katana, but she doesn’t draw it. Instead, she straightens, rolling her shoulders as if loosening them after a long day.

"Blade Lineage," she muses, stepping in a slow circle around you. "A gang of misfits, drifters, and butchers who don’t even bother pretending to be civilized. You don’t have hierarchy. You don’t have order. All you have is pain." Her voice dips lower, like steel being drawn from its sheath. "You think that makes you strong?"

You lift your head, lips curling despite the blood drying at the corners of your mouth. "I think it makes us free."

Ishmael stops behind you. You hear the soft rustle of fabric, then the whisper of something slicing through the air.

CRACK.

Agony blooms across your back as something hard and unyielding strikes your shoulder blade. Your body lurches forward, breath hitching from the sheer force of the blow. She struck you with the flat

of her katana—no blood drawn, but the ache burrows deep into the bone.

“Free?” Ishmael echoes, stepping into view again, golden eyes flashing with something sharp. "You lot barely live long enough to see the next day. What’s the point of freedom if it just means bleeding out in some alley?"

You breathe through the pain, rolling your shoulders with a rough laugh. “Sounds like you’re trying to convince yourself, Captain.”

Her eyes narrow. Then, without warning, she strikes again. The flat of her blade snaps against your ribs this time, forcing the air from your lungs in a sharp gasp. Your body jerks from the impact, the ropes straining against your wrists.

Still, you don’t scream.

Ishmael watches, searching your face for something—fear, submission, regret—but finds nothing. She clicks her tongue in irritation.

"Of course," she mutters, running a hand through her hair, knocking a few loose strands from her bun. "Pain doesn’t mean anything to you bastards, does it? You wear it like armor, flaunt it like it makes you untouchable."

She sighs, stepping back. “If pain won’t loosen your tongue, then perhaps I should be more creative.”

Her hand moves to her obi, pulling something free. A small, worn tanto—its blade polished, yet unmistakably old, its handle wrapped in darkened cloth.

“You know,” Ishmael muses, kneeling beside you, "there are places a blade can touch where the pain lingers far longer than a broken bone."

She presses the tip of the tanto against the inside of your forearm, just above the vein. Not deep enough to cut—just enough for you to feel the cold bite of steel against flesh.

“I could flay the skin from your fingers,” she continues, voice even. “Break your kneecaps one by one. Maybe take an ear, see if that gets a reaction.”

She tilts her head, studying you. “Nothing? Not even a twitch?”

You meet her gaze with something between defiance and amusement. "Do your worst, Captain."

Her grip tightens on the tanto. For a moment, you think she might actually do it—might carve into you just to prove a point.

Then, she exhales sharply and stands, slipping the blade back into her obi.

“Pointless,” she mutters. "A waste of time."

You can’t help but grin, despite the pain, despite the blood. “Giving up already?”

Ishmael’s lips twitch. Not quite a smirk—something colder.

Ishmael watches you for a long moment, the weight of her gaze pressing down like a sharpening whetstone. "Hardly.”

The ache in your ribs throbs in time with your pulse, but you refuse to let it show. You've endured worse. This is nothing.

Then, suddenly, she exhales and steps back, rolling out her shoulders. “Tch. You're not even worth the effort.”

She turns away, moving towards a low table in the corner of the dimly lit room. Your eyes track her every motion as she kneels with practiced ease, reaching for a small lacquered box.

Click.

The lid lifts, and the faint scent of something bitter and metallic lingers in the air. You recognize it instantly—an old trick from the Backstreets. A certain kind of powdered sedative, one that leaves its victims sluggish, compliant, but aware. A coward’s method.

You scoff. "Is this where we are now, Captain? I thought the Kurokumo Clan prided itself on its swordplay, not back-alley tricks."

Ishmael doesn’t even look at you as she carefully stirs the powder into a small ceramic cup of water. "And I thought the Blade Lineage prided itself on taking every fight head-on," she murmurs, tilting her head. "But here you are, bound like an animal. Seems we all have our compromises."

She rises, stepping towards you with unhurried ease. The cup in her hands doesn’t so much as tremble. Her expression remains unreadable

—calm, collected, almost bored.

“I could keep carving away at you,” she says casually, kneeling before you. "But what’s the point? Hurting you won’t make you talk."

She tilts the cup just slightly, letting you see the way the water darkens. "So let’s try something different."

You press your lips into a thin line. "Not happening."

Her smile is slow, knowing. "Oh, I think it is."

Before you can jerk away, she moves fast—fingers gripping your jaw, prying it open with sharp force. The rim of the cup presses against your lips and she digs her thumb into the cut on your cheek, the bitter liquid rushes down your throat before you can force yourself to resist. You sputter, cough, but she keeps her grip firm until she’s certain you’ve swallowed.

Then, with a satisfied hum, she leans back, rising to her feet. "There we go."

The effects don’t hit immediately. But when they do, it’s like sinking into thick, sluggish water. Your limbs feel distant, your thoughts slow, like they’re moving through molasses. Your body remains upright, but control is slipping, second by second.

Ishmael crouches again, golden eyes studying you with a quiet sort of amusement. "Still awake, aren’t you? That’s the nice thing about this one—it doesn’t knock you out. It just makes things easier."

You try to speak, to curse her, but your tongue feels thick, heavy.

She doesn’t seem to mind your silence. Instead, she leans in, voice dropping to something almost conspiratorial. “Now, let’s talk about something more interesting.”

She reaches into the folds of her kimono and pulls something free. A small, familiar object—thin needles, ink-stained, worn from use. Tattooing implements.

Your stomach turns.

Ishmael twirls a needle between her fingers, watching you. "You know what these are for, don’t you?"

You don’t answer. You don’t have to.

Her lips curl into something just short of a smirk. "Thought so."

She taps the needle against her palm, almost thoughtful. “Pain doesn’t scare you. I get that now. But this?" She gestures vaguely. "This isn’t just pain. This is a brand."

She leans in, her voice smooth as silk and twice as dangerous. "Imagine it—a fresh Kurokumo tattoo, inked right into your skin for everyone to see. The Blade Lineage would never take you back. You know how it is. They’d carve you open the second they saw it. And if they didn’t?” She tilts her head. "No other syndicate worth their salt would take some traitorous mutt."

Your fingers twitch, frustration bubbling beneath the surface. Your breath comes ragged, the weight of her words settling into your gut like lead.

She watches, waiting. Then, she lifts the needle, pressing the tip lightly against your collarbone—just enough to let you feel the sharp sting of it.

Her voice dips to a whisper. "So, what’s it going to be?"

It takes everything you have left.

Your limbs are leaden, your head feels stuffed with cotton, and the drug is weighing down on you like a thick fog. But through the haze, through the sluggishness sinking into your bones, one instinct remains sharp—defiance.

You force your body to move, every muscle protesting, and gather what little moisture is left in your dry mouth. Then, with every ounce of strength you can muster, you spit.

The glob of saliva lands just below Ishmael’s cheek, sliding down her jaw before dripping onto the collar of her kimono.

For a moment, there is nothing but silence.

Ishmael goes completely still.

You expect her to lash out, for the mask of calm to crack into something violent, for her to slam a fist into your already bruised ribs. It wouldn’t be the first time an interrogator let their temper slip.

But she doesn’t.

Instead, she lifts a hand, slow and deliberate, and wipes the spit away with her thumb. The motion is careful, almost absentminded, as if cleaning off nothing more than a stray drop of ink.

Then, she exhales, a quiet, measured sound, and tilts her head slightly to look at you. There's no anger in her expression. No irritation. Just something thoughtful.

Finally, she speaks. "Hm. That's the most effort you've put into anything since I started."

She flicks the moisture from her fingers, then lets her hand fall to her lap, still holding the tattoo needle in her other. "I should be annoyed, but honestly? I almost respect it."

Your breathing is heavy, labored from the exertion, but you meet her gaze as steadily as you can. If this is all you have left—petty, useless defiance—then so be it. You won't give her anything else.

She watches you for another long moment, as if considering something, then clicks her tongue. "You lot really are no better than animals."

She shifts her grip on the tattoo needle, rolling it between her fingers with idle ease. "Then I'll treat you like one."

Then, in one smooth motion, she leans in again, the needle pressing just barely against your skin, right at the base of your collarbone. The sharp sting bites through the sluggishness, a pinprick of clarity in the fog.

She hums. "Let's see how far that stubbornness takes you."

The first puncture is a spark—sharp, immediate, a bite of cold steel against fevered flesh.

Then, the fire sets in.

The needle buries itself into your skin, dragging ink beneath the surface in short, jagged motions. Each stroke sends a fresh wave of pain coursing through you, a searing, electric heat that burrows deep into your flesh. The drug in your system doesn't dull it—it does the opposite. Every nerve, every cell beneath Ishmael's careful, cruel hand is hyper-aware, amplifying every sensation until the pain is all-consuming.

Your breath shudders. Your fingers twitch in their bindings. You won't give her the satisfaction of crying out, but your body betrays you in smaller ways. The involuntary flinch of your shoulder. The tightening of your jaw. The way your muscles seize and tremble with each new puncture.

Ishmael notices. Of course, she notices.

"Mm. You're feeling it now, aren't you?" Her voice is calm, almost conversational, like she's merely discussing the weather.

The needle digs deeper, the pressure deliberate. A flare of agony erupts beneath your skin. This isn't just tattooing—this is punishment. Her strokes are rough, jagged. She lingers on one spot too long, pressing hard enough for the metal to scrape bone. You bite down on the inside of your cheek so hard you taste blood.

She clicks her tongue. "I'd suggest you stay still, but o I'm not exactly being gentle, am I?"

You muster whatever strength you have left, forcing words past clenched teeth. "Go to hell."

The response is instant.

A sharp crack—her open palm slams across your face, sending white-hot pain exploding through your skull. Your vision swims, ears ringing, the iron taste of blood flooding your mouth where your teeth cut into your tongue.

"Tsk. That's the best you can do?" She exhales, shaking her head as if disappointed. "Here I was, hoping for something a little more creative."

The needle returns to your skin. The ink burns, seeping into the freshly torn flesh. You can feel every second of it—every brutal, unforgiving stroke, every time the needle drags too deep or catches on torn skin. She isn't just marking you; she's carving the Kurokumo's brand into you like a cattle brand.

"You know," Ishmael muses, "I could make this look nice. Smooth lines, steady hand, all proper-like."

Another deep, dragging stroke—intentional, uneven, designed to hurt.

"But that wouldn't be as fun."

You grit your teeth, sweat and blood dripping down your chin. The Blade Lineage taught you to thrive off pain. You've endured blades, burns, broken bones. But this—this is different. This isn't a wound you can wear with pride. This is erasure.

She's stealing your name, your identity, your right to belong.

You gasp as the needle presses against a particularly sensitive nerve, pain flaring like lightning up your spine. Your body jerks on instinct.

Wrong move.

Ishmael sighs. "Tsk. Guess we need another reminder."

Her sword hilt slams into your ribs.

The force drives the air from your lungs, crushing the breath from you in a strangled, wheezing gasp. The pain in your stomach compounds with the fire under your skin, blurring into one overwhelming, suffocating agony.

"You're really making this difficult for yourself." She leans in, close enough for you to feel her breath against your ear. "But go ahead. Keep fighting. I don't mind taking my time."

She pulls back, resuming her work with agonizing slowness.

"You're being awfully quiet now," Ishmael muses, her tone almost playful. The needle presses in again, hitting sensitive spots on purpose. "Did I finally break that proud little spirit of yours?"

You glare at her through the haze of pain and exhaustion, your breathing ragged, but you say nothing.

"Come now, don't tell me you're sulking. I thought the Blade Lineage prided itself on bearing pain with a smile." She hums thoughtfully, adjusting her grip. "Or is it different when it's not earned in battle?"

She presses the needle down harder than necessary, a cruel motion that has your back arching against the restraints. The pain is unbearable, the drug amplifying every stroke until your nerves are screaming, raw and overexposed.

"Ah, there it is," Ishmael coos, watching the way your muscles seize, the way your fingers twitch despite your best efforts to remain still. "They don't train you guys against drugs do they?"

You grit your teeth, refusing to give her the reaction she wants, but she isn't finished.

"I wonder," she muses, voice dropping into something more amused. "Will your little friends even recognize you after this?" Another stroke of the needle, jagged, messy, twisting . "Or will they carve you up themselves for wearing our mark?"

She's trying to get in your head now, sinking her claws in deep.

"A traitor's brand…" She drags the needle in slow, deliberate circles, as if savoring the way you flinch beneath it. "No place left to call home. Not ours, not yours. I imagine the Blade Lineage will have fun with you when they find out. Thinking that you were a spy the whole time."

You force out a breath, heavy and uneven. "Better… them… than you," you manage, voice hoarse.

Ishmael chuckles, shaking her head. "Oh, I wouldn't be so sure of that."

She lifts the needle for a moment, admiring her work. The ink gleams slick with fresh blood, the twisted lines of the dark clouds forming beneath her hand. A brand of betrayal, of belonging to the enemy.

"And yet," she continues, her voice mockingly sweet, "I think I'll leave it unfinished." She tilts her head, smirking. "Just enough that it's recognizable—but not enough to be a proper mark."

A cruel kind of limbo. Not fully Kurokumo. Not fully Blade Lineage.

"You'll have to explain that, won't you?" Ishmael murmurs, tapping the needle against your skin. "To your people, when they see this half-done mark carved into you."

Your breath shudders, fury simmering beneath the pain.

She leans in again, voice a whisper against your ear. "Tell me… when they turn on you, when they carve you up as punishment, will you still be so eager to take the pain?"

Your body is trembling now, not just from agony but from exhaustion, from the slow-burning rage she's trying to stoke.

Then, she laughs softly, sitting back as she wipes the excess ink from

your ruined skin. "It's a shame, really. I was starting to enjoy myself." She trails a finger along the fresh wound, pressing down just enough to make you jolt. "But I think I've made my point."

She sets the needle aside, stretching as if she's simply finishing a tedious chore. "I do hope you make it back to them in one piece. I'd hate for this to go to waste."

Ishmael leans back, rolling her shoulders, the needle still nestled between her fingers. Your skin burns—fire laced with ink and blood, a mark only half-finished. An incomplete syndicate brand would be seen as not a sign of allegiance. It is a death sentence.

She sighs, clicking her tongue in mock disappointment. "You do realize what this means, don't you?" Her voice is almost gentle, like a teacher explaining something to a slow-learning student. "Your people see this, and they'll know exactly what happened here. You walked in as one of theirs, and now?" She chuckles, dragging her fingers over the ruined skin, making you twitch involuntarily. "You're nothing but a liability."

She sets the needle down, stretching leisurely as if the matter is already settled. "They'll carve you up the second they lay eyes on you," she continues, her voice light, casual. "Can't have a dog that's sniffed around the wrong feet, now can they?"

You breathe heavily through your nose, your muscles rigid, jaw clenched so tightly it feels like your teeth might crack.

"And us?" Ishmael continues, standing to loom over you. "Well, we sure as hell won't take you in like this. Can't be trusted. Can't be used." She tilts her head, regarding you with faux curiosity. "What do you think happens to a stray caught between two beasts?"

She doesn't give you time to answer.

"They get torn apart."

The words land heavy, like a blade pressing against your throat.

She crouches again, bringing herself closer, her breath warm against your ear. "But…" A single finger traces the ink in slow, thoughtful circles. "I could finish it."

Your breath stills.

"It wouldn't fix things with your little gang," Ishmael murmurs, almost sweetly, "but it would mean something here. A real mark. Not just a mangled brand for them to mock before they cut you down."

She pulls back slightly, watching you carefully. "You wouldn't be much, of course. Just a little foot soldier, maybe a personal pet of mine if I'm feeling generous." She smirks. "But you'd be breathing."

She lets the offer settle, watching the war playing out behind your eyes. The heat of pain dulls beneath the cold realization. There is no escape, no middle ground. There is only a slow, humiliating death at the hands of the Blade Lineage or survival under her boot.

She taps the side of your face lightly, forcing your tired eyes to meet hers. "So, what's it going to be?"

The room is unbearably silent, but even when you start to open your mouth you are cut off.

"Beg," she commands, her voice slipping into something softer, crueler. "Tell me you want it."

Your stomach twists.

She waits, amusement glinting in her eyes. "Come now. I thought the Blade Lineage was willing to do anything to survive."

Her fingers tighten on your chin, nails biting into your bruised jaw. "Or maybe I should just throw you back out there and see what happens?"

The words catch in your throat like glass. Beg? The very thought turns your stomach. You've endured the pain, the ink searing your flesh, the weight of her threats—but this?

You swallow, voice raw and rasping. "…Please."

Ishmael doesn't move.

A slow blink.

Then, a soft hum of disappointment.

The next thing you feel is steel.

A sharp, glancing strike from the flat of her katana sends a jolt through your neck, rattling you in place. The force behind it isn't

meant to kill—just to punish. Just to make you feel how unconvincing you sound.

"That was pathetic," she says, shaking her head. "Are you even trying?"

Your breath shudders out of you, pained and uneven.

Ishmael flicks the sword at her side. "You know, I really thought you'd be smarter than this."

Your fingers twitch, muscles locking as she takes a slow, measured step toward you. "You're begging for your life, aren't you? If you're going to do it, do it properly."

A boot presses against your already bruised side, pinning you down further. You grit your teeth.

Then you hear the glass bottle.

A soft clink as Ishmael retrieves it, swirling the liquid inside idly between her fingers. "Maybe I should just help you along," she says. "You already handled the last dose so well. I wonder how much more you can take before that brain of yours turns to mush."

Your breath comes faster now. Not from fear of pain—you know pain, live in it, thrive in it—but the drug? It made your skin crawl, turned every sensation into something unbearable, stripped you of everything except raw, screaming nerve endings.

Ishmael uncorks the bottle with her thumb, tilting it teasingly toward you. "Last chance," she sings. "Beg properly, or we keep going until you do."

The humiliation clenches in your throat like a vice. You swallow it down, knowing there's no escape.

Your hands twitch uselessly against your restraints. Then, through gritted teeth, you force the words out—louder this time, clearer, a break in your pride.

"Please," you rasp, voice hoarse and shaking. "Please... finish the tattoo..."

Ishmael watches, expression unreadable.

Then, slowly, a smirk curls at the corner of her lips.

"There it is," she murmurs, pleased.

She lowers the bottle, tucking it away, and instead reaches for the needle once more. The cold metal touches your skin, and she leans in, her breath warm against your ear.

"Good dog."

Then the needle pierces flesh again.

And this time, you don’t fight it.

Continuing where she left off the sting is immediate, a sharp prick that blooms into something deeper, something unbearable as Ishmael drags the ink through flesh. But the pain is secondary now. What truly settles in your gut like a sickness is the weight of her words.

Good dog.

Your teeth grind, the words lodging in your skull like a brand of their own. But you don’t fight it. You can’t afford to.

Ishmael works with an almost lazy precision, the rhythmic puncturing of the needle filling the silence between you. The ink pools and spreads, forever marking you as something less than what you were before. A traitor. A lost cause.

She exhales, amused. “You Blade Lineage types always think you’re so unbreakable. Death before bowing to another syndicate, all that good stuff?” The needle presses harder, biting deeper, sending a sharp flare of agony through your nerves.

You hiss between your teeth, but say nothing.

Her voice lowers, dripping with mockery. “Well it wouldn't be the first time, I already have a couple of you in my group.”

She leans in, so close you can almost feel the smirk on her lips. “They didn't nearly fold as easily as you did though.”

Your stomach knots.

The drug still lingers, twisting every sensation, amplifying everything to something grotesquely vivid. The scrape of her glove as she wipes excess ink away, the slow drag of the needle—every movement lingers like a burn beneath your skin.

Then, a pause.

You hear her shift, tilting her head as if examining her work. "Not bad," she muses. "But I think something's missing."

You tense as she lifts the needle again, this time pressing it to a fresh spot, far too high on your skin to be part of the original design.

A sinking realization hits.

She's adding more.

Your breath stutters. "That wasn't—"

A sharp slap snaps your head to the side, the taste of iron flooding your mouth.

"Did I ask for your input?" she says, voice utterly indifferent.

The room tilts, pain buzzing in your skull from the impact.

"You begged for my mark. That means I decide how much of you to claim."

Her voice is soft, almost thoughtful as she presses the needle back to your skin, carving something new into you. You don't know what. You're not sure you want to.

The moment the needle lifts from your skin for the final time, a sickening relief washes over you. It's done. The mark is seared into you, the ink still wet, the wound still raw. But it's finally over.

Ishmael leans back, admiring her work. "There. Now you look the part."

The sound of a blade scraping against its sheath makes your breath hitch.

But instead of steel, you feel the cold bite of a knife pressed against your bindings. With a flick, the rope snaps, and your arms drop uselessly to your sides, blood rushing back into your numbed limbs like fire.

"You should be grateful," she hums, rising to her feet. "Not everyone gets the privilege of walking out of here alive."

You barely hear her. Your body is already moving on instinct. The pain, the exhaustion, the humiliation—it all pushes you forward, demanding escape.

But the instant your foot touches the ground, a rush of air whistles past your ear—

And then, blinding pain.

Steel tears through flesh. The force of the blow knocks you back, your legs crumpling beneath you as blood spills fresh from the shallow cut now carved into your chest. The cold of her blade lingers, biting at your skin even as she pulls it away.

Ishmael tilts her head, looking down at you with something akin to disappointment. "Did I say you could stand?"

Your breath is ragged, adrenaline clashing against the drug's sluggish grip on your body. The cut isn't deep, but the message is clear—*she isn't done with you yet.*

Her boot presses down on your freshly marked shoulder, grinding into the inked flesh with cruel deliberation. You choke back a sound, your body jerking involuntarily at the fresh wave of agony.

She sighs, shaking her head. "Tch. And here I thought you were finally learning."

The weight on your shoulder increases. "Do you understand now?" Her voice is almost gentle. "This is what you are now. Mine. You don't move unless I allow it. You don't breathe without my permission."

Her foot lifts, but only so she can crouch down to your level. Her sword tilts under your chin, forcing your gaze up to meet hers.

"Dogs speak when spoken to." The blade angles ever so slightly, just enough for you to feel the promise of another cut. "And they do what they are told."

A sharp crack splits the air as Ishmael's zori collides with your jaw, sending your head snapping to the side. Pain blossoms across your face, a fresh sting layered atop the agony already carved into your skin. You barely have time to process it before another blow lands—this time, a ruthless backhand that leaves your vision swimming.

Red, everywhere, even when you close your eyes.

"You're slow to learn," Ishmael mutters, flexing her fingers before grabbing a fistful of your hair. She yanks your head back, forcing you to look up at her. Her golden eyes glint with something unreadable—contempt, amusement, something crueler than both.

Then, just as suddenly, she lets go. You slump forward, barely catching yourself on your hands before her foot presses against your face.

The wooden sole of her zori digs into your cheek, pinning you to the ground like an insect beneath her heel. You're forced to turn your head, half your vision obscured by her foot, but you can still see the glint of her sword as she raises it.

The cold metal of the blade hooks under your chin, lifting it just enough to force your gaze upward once more.

"Swear it," she orders, her voice measured, patient. "Swear your allegiance."

Her foot shifts slightly, pressing down just enough to make your breathing shallow, your pulse pound against your skull. "Beg for it if you have to, just get something of substance out."

Her tone is almost soft—mockingly so. Like she's waiting to see just how much pride you have left to shatter.

Your breath shudders as you swallow what's left of your previous devotion. There is no way out of this—not with your body battered, your mind swimming from the drug, and your back freshly scarred with the mark of the Kurokumo. The Blade Lineage would gut you on sight, and the Kurokumo would only tolerate you under Ishmael's heel. There is no future but the one she allows.

With trembling hands, you reach up, barely brushing your fingertips against the wooden sole of her zori. You tilt your head forward, intending to bring it to your lips, an act of submission that makes bile rise in your throat—

Shhk!

A sharp pain sears across your shoulder, the bite of steel tearing through flesh. You cry out, recoiling as fresh blood drips to the floor. Ishmael clicks her tongue, shaking her head in mock disappointment.

"No hands," she chastises, as if you were some foolish dog failing to

follow orders. She withdraws the blade, its edge painted with your blood, before pressing the sole of her zori against your face once more. "If you're going to beg, do it properly."

Your hands shake as you force them to the floor, splaying your fingers wide to keep them still. Shame boils under your skin, but it is drowned out by desperation. You lean forward, lips parting as you press them against the worn wood of her zori, tasting the faint bitterness of dust and blood.

It’s a degrading, wretched display—one that leaves your stomach twisted in knots.

Ishmael watches in silence, her foot still against your lips. Then, with slow deliberation, she drags her blade along your jaw, the cool metal a stark contrast to the heat of your humiliation.

"Now," she murmurs, amusement threading through her voice. "That’s more like it."

Your lips barely leave her zori before she shoves your head back with the sole of her foot, sending you sprawling onto the cold, bloodstained floor. The sting in your scalp barely registers over the throbbing ache of your body, but you don’t move—not yet. You know better now.

Ishmael steps away, her feet clicking softly against the floor as she moves toward her desk. The sound of a drawer sliding open fills the heavy silence, followed by the whisper of fabric unraveling. When she turns back to you, a spool of black ribbon dangles from her fingers.

She crouches beside you, her shadow swallowing your vision. Without a word, she loops the silk around your throat, the first pull firm—testing. The second, strangling.

The ribbon tightens, hard enough to out right choke, enough to let you know that you weren't gonna be making decisions for yourself any time soon.

"You've had your fun rotting in here," Ishmael murmurs, securing the knot with practiced ease. "Now, we're going for a walk."

She stands, giving the ribbon a slight tug, enough to force you forward onto your hands and knees.

And in the backstreets, something worse than death awaits those who don’t belong.

End Notes

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